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BIPARTISAN/BICAMERAL COALITION RALLY IN SUPPORT OF STEM CELL MEDICAL RESEARCH

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) today joined a bipartisan/bicameral coalition calling on President Bush to support embryonic stem cell research. At a rally on Capitol Hill, Schakowsky and others spoke of the need to federally fund this research that could be critical to curing the 100 million Americans who suffer from juvenile diabetes, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, cancer, heart disease, spinal cord injury, ALS, as well as many other diseases and conditions.

Following the rally, Schakowsky attended a hearing in the Government Reform Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources focusing on opportunities and advancements in stem cell research.

Below is Schakowsky's Committee statement.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman for calling this important hearing today about Stem Cell Research. While the debate over whether or not federal funds should be used for research has demonstrated itself to be an extremely controversial subject here in Washington, it is clear that a majority of the American public strongly supports embryonic stem cell research.

Stem-cell research is a medical issue; one that I hope shall transcend political lines and instead focus on human lives. One such life is that of Carolyn Laughlin, the mother of two diabetic sons in my hometown of Evanston, IL, who wrote me this past April to share her families struggles and urge my support for federally funded stem-cell research.

She wrote, "Diabetes haunts my family every waking hour. Injections, blood testing, calculating food portions, are constant companions of my sons. Overnight, I fear insulin reactions that will leave them unconscious. Long term, we face concerns of kidney failure, blindness, and amputations."

Most scientists are in agreement that embryonic cell-research offers the greatest hope to families like the Laughlins. The unique characteristics of these cells could be critical to curing the 100 million Americans who suffer, not only from juvenile diabetes, but Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, cancer, heart disease, spinal cord injury, ALS, as well as many other diseases and conditions. We are on the thresh hold of not only saving lives but dramatically improving the quality of millions of lives. We must be cautious of closing doors that could realize that improvement.

Adult stem cells have been incredibly instrumental in saving lives, as we can see from some of our panelists. There are however, limitations on the usefulness of adult stem

cells when compared to embryonic stem cells. Adult stem cells are difficult to obtain since they are often present only in minute quantities. They are also much more difficult to isolate and purify. Additionally, adult stem cells may have more DNA damage and they have a shorter life span than embryonic stem cells, rendering fewer cells. While it is important to continue working with adult stem cells, it is vital to include embryonic stem cells in this field of research. There is just not enough data currently to assume one stem cell source is better than another. We do a grave disservice to millions of sick Americans, as well as the millions who will develop these conditions in the future, by prohibiting promising research from continuing in both directions.

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I additionally urge my colleagues to keep in mind the other implications of not funding this research. Without public funding, scientist will increasingly turn to private companies. Private companies restrict the free flow of information, keeping their discoveries to themselves. Without the free flow of information, we risk slowing down major advancements in this field of research. We also risk losing our top scientists to other countries. This has already been a result of the delayed decision in continued funding. Yesterday morning, the newspapers reported the decision of Dr. Roger Pedersen's of the University of California, San Francisco to move to Britain to work on embryonic stem cell research. Last year, the British Parliament explicitly authorized research involving embryonic cells, as well as the creation of embryos for research purposes, for scientists who obtain permits. This action made Britain one of the most permissive nations on embryo work, though teams in Australia and Singapore have also aggressively pursued work on human embryonic stem cells. Without federal funding, we risk falling behind other countries such as Britain, Australia, and Singapore.□ □

Finally, we must remain aware, that science is moving quicker than we are legislating. Last week we heard of both the development of embryos for research at the Jones Institute for Reproductive Medicine and embryo clones at the Massachusetts biotechnology firm, Advanced Cell Technology. Federal funding guidelines assure that research will meet ethical standards and allow advancements to be made as quickly as possible. The Laughlins and millions of other families are counting on us.□ □

I do have some questions about stem cell research as they are derived from adults and embryos. I look forward to hearing from all of our witnesses today and engaging in a worthwhile discussion on this subject.